

Houston Oilers Playoff History



Houston Oilers playoff history is a fascinating journey through the annals of professional football, marked by moments of triumph and heartache. The Oilers, established in 1960 as part of the American Football League (AFL), were a franchise known for their resilience, talent, and distinctive style of play. Although the team no longer exists, its legacy continues to resonate with fans, particularly in the city of Houston. This article delves into the Oilers' playoff history, highlighting key seasons, notable players, and memorable games that have defined the franchise.

Early Years: Formation and AFL Success

The Houston Oilers were one of the eight original teams in the American Football League. Under the ownership of Bud Adams, the franchise quickly established itself as a competitive force.

1960–1966: Building a Foundation

The Oilers began their journey in the AFL with an innovative offense led by quarterback George Blanda. Their early years were characterized by:

- **Innovative Play:** The Oilers employed a high-scoring offense, setting the tone for their future success.
- **AFL Championships:** The team won the AFL championship in 1960, defeating the Los Angeles Chargers, marking their first playoff appearance.

1967–1970: Competitive Struggles

Despite early success, the Oilers struggled to maintain their dominance through the late 1960s. They made the playoffs only once during this period, in 1967, where they lost to the Oakland Raiders.

The Dawn of the NFL: Merger and New Challenges

With the AFL-NFL merger in 1970, the Houston Oilers became part of the National Football League. This transition brought new challenges and opportunities for the franchise.

1970s: The Era of the "Luv Ya Blue" Oilers

In the late 1970s, under head coach Bum Phillips, the Oilers adopted a fan-friendly persona known as "Luv Ya Blue." This era produced several playoff appearances:

- 1978 Season: The Oilers finished with a 10-4 record, securing a playoff berth. They lost to the Denver Broncos in a close match, a game that showcased their potential.
- 1979 Season: The Oilers reached the playoffs again but were defeated by the Pittsburgh Steelers in the AFC Divisional Round.

Key Players of the Era

The success of the late 1970s can be attributed to several key players:

- Earl Campbell: The standout running back, who won the NFL MVP award in 1979, became the face of the franchise.
- Dan Pastorini: The quarterback who led the team during this period with his strong arm and leadership.

The 1980s: A Decade of Ups and Downs

The 1980s proved to be a mixed bag for the Oilers. While they showcased talent, inconsistencies often plagued their playoff performances.

1980 Season: Playoff Heartbreak

The 1980 season saw the Oilers return to the playoffs, finishing with an 11-5 record. However, they faced a heartbreaking loss against the Oakland Raiders in the AFC Wild Card game, with the game ending in a controversial 27-7 defeat.

1987 Season: The Strike Year

The 1987 NFL players' strike interrupted the season, but the Oilers still

managed to make an impact. They finished with a 9-7 record, earning a playoff spot, but once again fell short, losing to the New York Jets in the Wild Card round.

1990s: The Rise of a Contender

The early 1990s marked a significant turning point for the Oilers as they transitioned from perennial underdogs to genuine Super Bowl contenders.

The 1991 Season: AFC Central Champions

The Oilers achieved their first AFC Central Division title in 1991, finishing the season with a 10-6 record. Key moments included:

- AFC Wild Card Victory: They defeated the New York Jets in the Wild Card round, showcasing their potential.
- AFC Divisional Round: The Oilers faced the Buffalo Bills but lost in a dramatic game, a precursor to the heartbreak that would define the franchise.

1992-1993: The Comeback Kid

The 1992 playoffs were particularly memorable for the Oilers, as they faced the Buffalo Bills in the 1992 AFC Wild Card game. This game is famously known for:

- The Comeback: The Oilers held a 35-3 lead at one point but ultimately lost 41-38 in overtime, marking one of the most significant collapses in NFL history.

The following year, the Oilers returned to the playoffs but faced a similar fate, losing in the Divisional Round to the Kansas City Chiefs.

The Final Years: Transition and Relocation

As the mid-1990s approached, the Oilers faced numerous challenges, both on and off the field.

1994-1995: Declining Performance

The Oilers continued to struggle in the playoffs, experiencing early exits and growing frustration among fans. Notable points include:

- 1994 Season: Finished with a 10-6 record but lost to the Pittsburgh Steelers in the Wild Card round.
- 1995 Season: The team faced the San Diego Chargers in the playoffs, suffering another disappointing loss.

Relocation to Tennessee

In 1996, the Oilers announced their impending move to Nashville, Tennessee. The final season in Houston was marked by:

- 1996 Season: The team played its last year as the Houston Oilers, finishing with a 7-9 record. The team officially changed its name to the Tennessee Titans in 1999.

Legacy and Impact

Despite their struggles, the Houston Oilers left an indelible mark on the NFL. Their playoff history reflects both the highs and lows of a franchise that was ahead of its time in many respects.

Influence on Future Teams

The Oilers' innovative offensive strategies and the emergence of stars like Earl Campbell paved the way for future generations of NFL players and coaches. Their legacy continues to influence teams in Nashville and beyond.

Fan Loyalty

The passionate fan base in Houston remains dedicated to the Oilers' memory. Even after the team's relocation, the spirit of the Oilers lives on in the hearts of many Houston residents, with nostalgic gatherings and events celebrating the franchise's history.

Conclusion

The Houston Oilers playoff history is a tapestry woven with moments of brilliance and heartbreak. From their inception in the early 1960s to their final days as a Houston franchise, the Oilers showcased incredible talent and resilience. Their legacy, while marked by near-misses and dramatic losses, continues to be celebrated by fans and serves as a testament to the enduring spirit of the game. As the NFL evolves, the story of the Houston Oilers remains a vital chapter in the history of professional football, reminding us of the passion and excitement that accompanies the pursuit of greatness on the gridiron.

Frequently Asked Questions

What year did the Houston Oilers first make the playoffs?

The Houston Oilers first made the playoffs in 1978.

How many times did the Houston Oilers reach the playoffs during their existence?

The Houston Oilers reached the playoffs a total of 12 times from 1978 to 1996.

What was the furthest the Houston Oilers advanced in the playoffs?

The furthest the Houston Oilers advanced in the playoffs was to the AFC Championship Game, which they reached in 1978, 1979, 1980, and 1993.

Who was the head coach of the Houston Oilers during their playoff runs in the early 1990s?

Jack Pardee was the head coach of the Houston Oilers during their notable playoff runs in the early 1990s.

What notable playoff game did the Houston Oilers lose after leading by 32 points?

The Houston Oilers lost the famous 'Comeback' game against the Buffalo Bills in the 1992 playoffs after leading by 32 points.

Which quarterback led the Houston Oilers during their playoff appearances in the 1980s?

Warren Moon was the quarterback who led the Houston Oilers during their playoff appearances in the 1980s.

What was the Oilers' playoff record before the team relocated to Tennessee?

The Houston Oilers had a playoff record of 8 wins and 10 losses before the team relocated to Tennessee in 1996.

In what year did the Houston Oilers last make the playoffs?

The Houston Oilers last made the playoffs in 1993.

What was the main reason for the Houston Oilers' relocation to Tennessee?

The main reason for the Houston Oilers' relocation to Tennessee was financial difficulties and the need for a new stadium.

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